

U.S. DISABILITY RIGHTS LAW: VOTING

In the United States, persons with disabilities have the right to vote, hold public office, and otherwise participate in the political process on an equal basis with others.

Polling places: Public entities should ensure that all polling places in each precinct or voting district have accessible parking, accessible exterior routes, accessible entrances and accessible interior routes to the voting area. Each polling place should have at least one voting booth that can accommodate voters who use wheelchairs, and magnifiers for persons with low vision. Where resources do not permit permanent measures, facilities can be temporarily retrofitted for election day by the use of mobile ramps and by posting additional disabled parking signs.

If a community is unable to make all of its polling places accessible,

Alternate locations: Public entities should identify and publicize alternate accessible polling places in each precinct or voting district where persons with disabilities may vote.

Same-day balloting: Public entities should provide opportunities for same-day balloting that ensure that voters with disabilities have the same degree of information available to them when casting their ballots as others. In addition to permitting voting at alternate accessible locations, election officials should provide curbside voting at the inaccessible polling place on election day.

Voting equipment: When a public entity purchases new voting machines, one such machine per polling precinct should allow for persons who are blind or have low vision to vote privately and independently, and should be accessible to those who use wheelchairs or have limited manual dexterity.

Arrangement of equipment: When setting up voting equipment, public entities should ensure that the accessible equipment is located on an accessible route and placed on an accessible surface. Controls and operating mechanisms should be within the reach range of a wheelchair user.

Voter registration: Public entities should ensure that voter registration locations are accessible to persons with disabilities, and, where they are not, allow persons to register to vote through alternative means or at alternative locations. All registration materials should be available in alternate formats, including braille, large print, audiotape, and computer disk.

Training: Public entities should provide training for poll workers on the rights of people with disabilities and the practical means of assuring those rights. The training should cover:

- maintenance of the physical accessibility of polling locations
- operation of the accessibility features of voting equipment; and
- assistance for persons with disabilities.

(Circulated by the United States during the Seventh Session of the Ad Hoc Committee on a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities, January 16 – February 3, 2006)